



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2004 - 2005

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Argentina

The Government of Argentina generally respected the human rights of its citizens. Argentina continued to recover politically and economically from its recent economic crisis, although widespread poverty and high unemployment levels remained. Argentina's press was free and independent, frequently critical of government policy and personnel, and civil society remained extremely active and engaged. Despite these trends, problems remained.

There were instances of killings and brutality by police and prison officials. Although police and prison officials faced prosecution and convictions for offenses, impunity remained a serious problem, as did allegations of corruption. Overcrowding in jails and prisons, as well as substandard conditions within those facilities, persisted. This problem was exacerbated by inordinate delays in investigations and trials and lengthy investigative detention periods. Lack of resources, the need for judicial reforms, and a weak investigative infrastructure make significant short-term improvements unlikely. Anti-Semitism remained a concern. Domestic violence and sexual harassment against women were problems. Coordination in combating trafficking in persons remained an issue, despite the fact that the Government of Argentina increased its efforts to combat trafficking and the sexual exploitation of minors.

The United States worked with the Argentine Government, media, civil society and security forces to strengthen democratic institutions, encourage civil society participation, and fight corruption. These efforts aimed to increase transparency, strengthen the judiciary, and combat trafficking in persons.

Throughout the year, U.S. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission, engaged in a continuing dialogue with Argentine policy and opinion makers on human rights, democratic governance and rule of law issues. Embassy Officials maintained a high profile with national and provincial officials, press and civil society groups in investigating and following up on allegations of torture, abuse and extra-judicial killings. The United States engaged with national and provincial government authorities on specific human rights cases and maintained close contact with major human rights and civic education NGOs. Through its annual country reports on human rights, religious freedom and trafficking in persons, the United States maintained these issues in the public and official discourse. The Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission and other Embassy officers were in a continuous dialogue with the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding issues before the UN Commission on Human Rights and the UN General Assembly to ensure Argentina's support for improvements of human rights practices in the region and worldwide.

Argentina has an active and engaged civil society, but some of its most marginalized and disadvantaged groups, such as indigenous communities, need assistance to support their efforts to organize. Several Native American speakers offered Argentine indigenous communities practical steps for reviewing and shaping sustainable plans for community development. Using experiences of U.S. tribes, these speakers illustrated the importance of citizen participation by indigenous peoples in their communities to ensure sustainable development. They shared success stories for building sustainable communities and starting small businesses. The programs included visits to some of Argentina's poorest indigenous communities. Their message of focusing on building strong communities through ethical leaders, good governance and the establishment of long-term, responsible public policies was well received by indigenous Mapuche and Wichi audiences. Shortly after this program, the indigenous community of Amaicha del Valle dismissed their corrupt chief of over 20 years, established a committee to review their constitution, and elected a new chief.

On judicial reform, the United States sponsored several speakers who engaged local audiences on such issues as continuing education for judges, and conducted a series of digital video conferences with a local

consortium under the rubric of "Justice Undergoing Change," which provided a 20-hour "train the trainer" course. As a measure of its success, one of the Argentine participants in the course was invited to Guatemala to conduct a conflict-management session with that country's 22 provincial governors. Two speakers discussed Argentina's transition to jury trials. One speaker addressed the Senate, which is considering a bill to introduce the use of jury trials in cases of public corruption and other serious crimes. The second spoke to large and enthusiastic audiences in Buenos Aires (including members of the Supreme Court, the Senate, City Council members, NGOs and members of the legal community) and engaged audiences in Cordoba, Mendoza, Misiones, Neuquen and Entre Rios through digital video conferences.

Transparency and accountability in the public sector are essential elements in democratic governance and the protection of human rights. The United States continued to enhance transparency and public participation in the policy process by hosting International Visitors (IVP) trips, programming U.S. speakers, and distributing materials. Melanie Ann Pustay, Deputy Director of the U.S. Department of Justice's Freedom of Information Office, conducted a week-long workshop for some 100 Argentine Ministry of Justice officials on Freedom of Information Act issues and practices. Ms. Pustay, the Ambassador, and the Legal Attaché also participated in a WORLDNET interactive program on anti-corruption with some twenty Argentine NGOs and Anti-Corruption Office officials. In November, The Trust for the Americas/Organization of American States, together with the Argentine NGO Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth and with U.S. Government support, began implementing an initiative to improve the quality of journalism in Argentina as a tool to fight corruption, both in the public and private sectors.

A Principal Advisor to the State Department's Anti-Corruption Program spoke to Argentine audiences to discuss the progress made at the Special Summit of the Americas in Monterrey on anti-corruption issues and the challenges still to be faced. He opened Argentina's Catholic University's graduate program on public ethics and engaged with NGOs and government officials.

The United States continued to ensure that civic education programs, emphasizing respect for human rights and civilian control of the military, were an integral part of training provided to Argentine military personnel and Ministry of Defense (MOD) civilians. The United States applied vigorous and comprehensive vetting of all military and MOD civilian participants in international military education and training programs, in compliance with the Leahy Amendment.

Combating trafficking in persons (TIP) remained a top U.S. priority in Argentina. The Deputy Chief of Mission led U.S. inter-agency engagement with Argentine government officials, NGOs and international organizations. A representative of the Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons visited Argentina twice in 2004 to raise awareness of the issue and meet with officials, prosecutors, the International Organization for Migration and NGOs. He gave an interview to a major entertainment and news network, effectively explaining U.S. policy and ongoing programs. The United States lobbied the Argentine Government to formalize its interagency coordination process and appoint a central coordinator of activities. At the end of the year the Federal Office of Victim's Assistance under the Attorney General's Office was identified as the coordinator of anti-TIP efforts.